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ON PAGE 1-BWASHINGTON TIMES  
12 February 1986

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# So why did Stalin happen?

Come let us now speak of infamous men, namely Josef Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev and all their successors. For in a little while, it will be the 30th anniversary of Mr. Khrushchev's anti-Stalin speech, the world-famous one in which he recounted some of the crimes of the Soviet dictator during his quarter-century reign.

Stalin effectively ruled the Soviet Union from 1929 to 1953, in what is probably the most sanguinary reign of terror in all recorded history. He was extraordinarily successful in covering up his human butchery and finding Western apologists to explain away his crimes. I have no doubt that the genocidists who followed him — in Hitler's Germany, in Mao Tse-tung's China, in Idi Amin's Uganda, in Ho Chi Minh and Pol Pot's Southeast Asia — were much influenced by Stalin's achievement in finding so many willing dupes in the West to glorify him.

On Feb. 25, 1956, almost three years after Stalin's death, Mr. Khrushchev addressed a closed session in Moscow of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In that 20,000-word speech he recited Stalin's iniquities in graphic, horrifying detail — "barbaric tortures," "abuse of power," "mass terror against the Party cadres," "mass acts of abuse against socialist legality," "odious falsification and criminal violation of socialist legality," "odious falsification and criminal violation of revolutionary legality," "the most brutal violation of socialist legality, torture and oppression . . . self-accusation of innocent people," "large-scale repression against the military cadres."

He described Stalin as "capricious, irritable, and brutal," informed by a "persecution mania [which] reached unbelievable dimensions." He said that "honest Communists were slandered, accusations against them were fabri-

cated, and revolutionary legality was gravely undermined." Not even the most outraged anti-Communist would have used such language about Stalin, not so much from lack of will as from lack of the kind of intimate documentation which Mr. Khrushchev submitted to his Party audience.

The Khrushchev speech itself was never officially published by the U.S.S.R. (Mr. Khrushchev confirmed its existence in his memoirs, *Khrushchev Remembers*, published after his ouster in October 1964). It was, however, made public worldwide by the CIA in June 1956.

Its provenance was never in question. Copies of the speech were circulated all over the U.S.S.R. in restricted fashion. It was read aloud and discussed at party meetings, but the speech itself was never handed around to rank-and-file party members. The speech shook the non-Russian Communist world, where Stalin had been the godhead.

In the West, the usual wide-eyed mystics of the left thought the speech heralded real changes in the "evil empire." Disillusion set in when the Red Army put down anti-Soviet outbreaks in Poland. Later in the fall of 1956, came the Hungarian uprising, accompanied by Red Army massacres of the Hungarian revolutionaries.

Actually there should have been no illusions about the implications of the "secret" speech, because what Mr. Khrushchev was really doing was masking the meaning of Stalin's Great Terror with a euphemistic phrase, "cult of personality." In other words, there was nothing wrong with Lenin's revolution. What was wrong were Stalin's terrible neuroses.

As Edward Crankshaw put it, the speech was a "smokescreen as well as an exposure," intended to establish "Stalinism without tears."

In fact, by September 1956 the rehabilitation of Stalin, initiated by Mr. Khrushchev despite his anti-Stalin speech, was well under way. The rehabilitation of Stalin continues to this day under Mikhail Gorbachev.

Mr. Khrushchev omitted a great deal of Soviet history from the speech. So far as Mr. Khrushchev was concerned, his indictment was selectively based on those of Stalin's crimes which had been committed against party leaders and officials, Soviet marshals and generals. The 20 million or more ordinary Soviet men, women, and children exterminated by Stalin in the interests of forced collectivization merited not even a phrase in Mr. Khrushchev's speech. As the Yugoslav diplomat, Veljko Micunovic, wrote in his book, *Moscow Diary*:

"Not even in secret did Khrushchev mention the millions of completely innocent Soviet citizens whom the Soviet leaders sent to their death; he spoke only about a few outstanding individuals, high officials of the CPSU who were executed for nothing. Khrushchev did not say a single word about the fact that the Soviet Union had imposed the very same system of executing innocent and decent people, high officials and government, on all countries of Eastern Europe under Soviet domination. . . . But even at the 20th Con-

gress the Russians whitewashed Stalin as far as crimes committed in the East European countries of 'people's democracies' were concerned."

For Mr. Khrushchev, the secret speech was part of his strategy to beat back his opposition within the party. And it worked, because in July 1957, he was able to purge his party enemies and to become what has been called "dictator by consent." Eventually, Mr. Khrushchev himself was overthrown by a cabal of younger apparatchiks, such as Leonid Brezhnev, who owed him everything except, it seems, their loyalty.

Those pro-Soviet pilgrims who for an optimistic moment thought that Soviet anti-Stalinism meant the end of Stalinism were extraordinarily wrong. (Any competent Sovietologist knows that optimism about

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